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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF
STATE PASS AID
LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA -- PREPARATIONS UNDERWAY FOR PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIONS IN SELF-DECLARED INDEPENDENT SOMALILAND

REF: NAIROBI 3575

Classified By: MICHAEL J. FITZPATRICK, POLITICAL COUNSELOR, REASONS 1.4
(B) AND (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: Somaliland's National Electoral Commission (NEC), its political elite, civil society organizations, and public at large are finalizing preparations to elect an 82-member Parliament on September 29. Despite extraordinary organizational and logistical challenges, chances are very good that this election will be free, fair, and a decisive indicator of the voters' will. The problem of the status of the disputed districts of Sool and Sanaag is still the greatest obstacle to a successful poll. Nonetheless, there is a willingness to again finesse the question, and suggestions that neighboring Puntland will not interfere. (NOTE: Reftel provided background on interrelations among "Somaliland," "Puntland" and "Somalia".) END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Somalia Watcher and USAID/RED SO/ESA/LPC Officer traveled August 30-31 to Hargeisa, capital of the self-proclaimed independent Republic of Somaliland. The trip was conducted in cooperation with the Somalia Democratization Steering Committee (DSC). The DSC is composed of Denmark, the European Commission, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK, countries that are providing indirect financial assistance through NGO implementing partners for the September 29 Somaliland legislative elections. The committee was set up to oversee and coordinate the operations of the Somali Democratization Program, implemented throughout Somalia through War-torn Societies Project International (WSP-International) and its affiliates in Somalia and Somaliland. In the case of Somaliland's parliamentary election, the U.S. provides complementary support through the International Republican Institute, and so is an observer to the DSC.

EXTRAORDINARY
SECURITY PRECAUTIONS

3. (C) Recent specific and credible reports of possible terrorist activities in Somaliland directed at international interests have led Post to defer virtually all travel to Somaliland, and to refuse requests for country clearance for and/or facilitation of the travel of USG and Congressional employees. However, given the critical stage at which election preparations have arrived, and the gap of nearly a year since Somalia Watcher's last visit to Hargeisa, Post took extraordinary security measures to mitigate risks and allow the trip to go forward. These included

-- Limiting the stay to one overnight.

-- Requiring that two Diplomatic Security Special Agents from Nairobi RSO accompany Embassy and USAID to liaise with Somaliland National Police and provide necessary security support.

-- Chartering direct air transport with no refueling from the UN Common Aviation Service (UNCAS).

-- Ensuring that the UNCAS aircraft remains on the ground during visit.

-- Obtaining round-the-clock escort and guard force services from the Somaliland National Police's Special Protection Unit (SPU).

-- Restricting USG team's movements in Hargeisa.

-- Maintaining separate ground transport from rest of DSC group.

PACKED AGENDA

4. (SBU) Embassy and USAID Offs joined the DSC in meetings with (a) the National Electoral Commission, (b) Ministry of Interior and National Police officials; (c) civil society groups; (d) the Women's Caucus of Parliamentary Candidates,

and (e) all three political parties contesting the elections.

The visit ended with a DSC courtesy call on Somaliland President Riyale. In addition, Somalia Watcher conducted "bilateral" meetings with the Somaliland Minister of Finance (septel) and Minister of Interior, the later joined by the Deputy Director General for National Intelligence and Immigration (reftel). USAID Off also conducted a round-table discussion on Somaliland's fragility and resilience as a "fragile state" with key implementing partners, and met with the Minister of Education to discuss USAID programs.

STATUS OF ELECTION PREPARATIONS

15. (SBU) The NEC gave a full briefing to the DSC members on tasks accomplished so far in election preparations. Voter education programs were underway in both urban and rural areas. Regional- and District-level election officers (REOs and DEOs) were selected, as had a total of 982 locations for polling stations. Staff training had begun with training of trainers (TOT) sessions conducted with individuals recruited from the three universities in Somaliland, as well as from a local NGO. These trainers had then been dispatched to train REOs and DEOs in two training cycles conducted in the towns of Hargeisa, Burao, Boroma and Erigavo. Next, the trainers and REO/DEOs teamed up to train parliamentary candidates, mayors, and other government officials on the conduct of the election. Future training was planned for the week of September 10 for logistics workers, polling station staff (recruited among students at the national universities, high school students in grades 11 and 12, former polling station staff with clean records from prior elections, teachers, and the "educated unemployed"), political party polling station agents, local observers, and police. In all, over 10,000 individuals would receive some level of training in the conduct of the poll.

16. (SBU) Other major hurdles that had been cleared as of end-August included the submission of party candidate lists, which the NEC then screened for qualifications under the electoral law, disqualifying roughly a dozen of the more than 240 candidates. The NEC stated that the complete candidate list is now available on the Commission's website at www.somalilandelectoralcommission.org. Non-sensitive election materials such as the 1,500 ballot bags, and bag seals, had been purchased or ordered. Sensitive materials, including the 1.3 million ballot papers themselves, and 12,000 sample papers were scheduled for delivery from the UK printers September 12. Voter marking ink -- a fluorescent variety used with success in South Africa, along with the lamps and extra batteries and bulbs -- would be delivered a week before the election.

17. (SBU) The NEC identified a number of challenges still before them in preparing for this historic event. These included the completion of the rural voters education program, hampered by the nomadic electorate's lack of fixed addresses and high level of illiteracy, as well as the poor communication and transportation infrastructure. The NEC was facing down relentless pressure from all parties to add to the number of polling stations, under the presumption that more stations produced more votes. The challenges confronting election logistics sometimes seemed biblical in scale -- incredibly difficult terrain, requiring days of driving by 4 X 4 vehicle to reach remote polling stations; the total lack of communication infrastructure in some areas; thousands of individuals to train; and the constant threat that rain would bring the whole process to a slippery halt.

VERY ENCOURAGING

18. (SBU) The DSC came away from the two days of meetings with the feeling overall that this election would go ahead, no matter the challenges. The Delegation of the European Commission in Nairobi, chair of the DSC, issued a press statement after the visit, noting that "Considerable progress had been made in the preparations for the elections ... The Steering Committee warmly commends the dedication of the NEC and its partners, not least the energetic efforts of civil society groups ... to promote democracy ... The Steering committee is also much encouraged by the commitment expressed by all three political parties to holding peaceful, fair and free elections in line with the Code of Conduct concluded on 18 July."

COMMENT

19. (C) The feeling that this election has a very good chance of a successful conclusion is palpable in Hargeisa. When the subject of the lack of a coherent security plan for the two-week period on either side of the election date came up, the Somalilanders' reaction was simple: "This election is ours, and we will all be responsible for policing and security -- it's how we did it before." That said, from the

point of view of potential international observers, this question was raised several times with the Commissioner of Police and Minister of Interior, who were lamentably short of answers, other than to say that a plan would be in place in time. We believe that, as is often the case, Somaliland during this election will be extraordinarily safe for Somalilanders -- but might be a bit dicey for internationals. This might actually be to the benefit of confirming a free and fair result -- there will likely be fewer international observers to be protected, leaving the job of election monitoring to a small cadre of highly qualified professional observers, joined by a team of Nairobi-based Somalia watchers to do the job with less hindrance. END COMMENT
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